

November 11, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

By now you should be well acquainted with your student teacher and hopefully together you are able to carve out a path toward his or her full-time engagement next semester. It is time for a moment of reflection and to look ahead.

In the packet that we sent you (both in paper and electronically) we included a *Practicum Checklist* (green). Please take some time with your student teacher and review what they have accomplished and what they could possibly do in preparation for student teaching. You may have noticed that we tried to design the checklist in a scaffolded way, such that the tasks gradually increase in complexity.

1. We also included a *Pre-Student Teaching Evaluation* form. Please take some time to take stock with your student teacher regarding where they stand in your experience with them. This is an important form that we will ask you to send electronically in early December. We use that as part of our assessment system.
2. For their methods course student teachers are asked to put together a *Student Teaching Syllabus*. They will ask for your assistance with this in the coming weeks. We will provide you with an electronic copy of this assignment. From a supervision point of view, our point of departure for helping the student teacher toward meeting the RIPTS is to begin with those aspects of teaching that they are most concerned about. (This almost always includes classroom management, but many are also concerned how to engage unmotivated students, and how to plan from the learners' perspective(s), and most of all they are concerned to be seen and respected as a teacher figure by your students.) Putting together this syllabus also is an opportunity to plan out the student teaching experience with them (more about this below).
3. Here are some rules of thumb that we respectfully, but urgently ask you to follow with your student teacher in preparation for and during student teaching:
 - a. Our students are transitioning to the world of professional teaching. In the fall semester many have heavy student demands on them. They must pass courses and have a plethora of assignments; they must pass Praxis exams; they must submit a dizzying array of paperwork; and they must spend significant time with you; and so on. What we expect from them is that they always communicate clearly about their needs. They are working towards their teacher identity. Some may have difficulty balancing all of this. This is a wonderful opportunity to do some counseling with your student teacher. Please keep us in the loop with any concerns you have. We will work with you to create interventions when necessary.

- b. During student teaching, in the spring, **we expect student teachers to be able to handle 60-80% of your load by the end of their time with you.** We ask you to assign tasks that gradually increase in complexity (a gradual approach). To that end, especially in the high school placement, consider having your student teacher start with classes, such as algebra 1 or foundation classes, that are less demanding on the math content and allow them more focus on working with kids (this is one of the main areas of their concerns). If you have two sections of the same course, then we highly encourage that the second section they take over is of the same course. This will encourage reflection and the making of adjustments, and subsequently the opportunity to try these out and learn from them.
- c. **Please do not hand over all your courses to them at once.** This removes all opportunity for reflection. Remember that they are learning to teach and need your supervision and feedback for a substantial period. Consider intervals of two to four weeks before you hand over another class/course. Reflection is a key component in our teacher preparation work with the student teachers. During the fall they learn to use an inquiry based reflection model and in the spring they are asked to submit weekly reflections using that model. Designing a daily and weekly schedule with them that provides explicit periods of time to do such a reflection is ideal.
- d. For the high school placement, **focus on having the student teacher teach courses that he/she is most likely to teach as a beginning teacher:** Pre-Algebra, Remedial Math, Algebra 1, Algebra 2 and Trig, and Geometry. When courses increase in complexity too quickly student teachers tend to lose focus on their students and are too pre-occupied with the mathematics. This is normal, but can put a dent in the student teacher's confidence. Furthermore these advanced courses (pre-calculus, honors sections, calculus, etc.), as you probably know better than we do, take an enormous amount of preparation. This will stifle the opportunities for reflection, which is the most important component we build in to the development of pre-service and novice teachers. If things progress really well, we have no problem in having the student teacher teach such a high level class for the last two weeks of the placement. If the student teacher is at the high school placement for the entire semester, this could be a somewhat longer period.
- e. **Schedule time in the day where you and your student teacher reflect on the day's work and plan ahead.** You need assurances that what the student teacher plans to be doing will promote the learning of your students that is needed. This is a paramount goal that we feel strongly about. Your daily coaching is essential. If possible, arrange a desk or a space for the student teacher where they can keep their possessions and where they can do their work. **In the beginning of the placement, please insist on more detailed lesson plans.** Student teachers need to plan explicitly. They don't have many years of experience and materials to pull from. Almost everything is new to them. Planning (and teaching) together is highly encouraged in the first few weeks.
- f. When you engage in a reflection on their teaching with them, try to refrain from beginning with your comments/suggestions/observations. **Let the**

- student teacher begin with their reflections of the lesson.** Give them a chance to identify what they think they need to change. Let them think about how they might do this. Then offer some of your ideas. It is very tempting to give them just a quick idea, but that creates dependence, which they cannot rely on once they have their own job. In our supervisory visits and observations we will use the same approach. **We look for significant development in their ability to reflect and articulate this during the student teaching experience as they transition to professional teaching.** If possible we can do our first observation of the student teacher together with you and guide/model the lesson reflection process. Please let us know if you would like to do this.
- g. In many placements we have tried to have two or more student teachers in the same school. This is purposeful. We have learned from our own practice and from research that student teachers who learn in a peer environment exhibit more growth. Just as we know that promoting peer discourse in the classroom is effective, so it is for student teachers. We hope that together with your colleague(s) you can provide opportunities for these peers to plan together, observe each other, possibly co-teach, and reflect together under your guidance.
 - h. Involve the student teacher in as many aspect of the job as possible, including working with parents and community organizations, team meetings, faculty meetings, staff development opportunities, and so on. Please also engage the student teacher in efforts that deal with RIDE initiatives.
 - i. We encourage the student teachers to follow as many of your routines as they are comfortable with, however we also hope you invite them to try to find their own personal style in the practice of teaching. This, we hope, is the least disruptive to your students.
 - j. At the risk of being repetitive, our paramount concern is for your students. **We believe that the student teachers need to make significant contributions to the learning of mathematics of your students.** If at any time you have a concern about this, please contact us immediately. This is very important for us. We want student teachers to add value, not be a burden.

In January we will provide you with a new set of information and forms regarding formal observations and other assessments that need to be completed for the student teaching period.

During the fall we will try to visit those cooperating teachers who are new to us so we can get to know each other.

Once again our sincerest thanks for all you do in mathematics education. Your professionalism deserves our deepest respect. Please do not hesitate to contact us at any time.

Best wishes,
Kees de Groot, Donna Wnuk, and Sue Osberg.